

THE WITNESS OF THE IMPRISONED



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THE CHURCH IN EAST GERMANY

We have decided to publish as a special number of the *Federation News Sheet* substantial extracts from a booklet written in German by Martin Fischer¹, one of the officers of the German *Evangelische Studentengemeinde*, about the situation of the church and Christian students in Eastern Germany as it has developed in the course of the last several months. The press has already given much attention to it, but sometimes the reports have been erroneous and it is important to correct them.

In recent months a concerted campaign has been waged against the *Junge Gemeinde*, the youth work of the Evangelical Churches. Just before Easter pupils in secondary schools were asked to vote at assemblies resolutions condemning the European Defense Treaty and the *Junge Gemeinde*. It was made clear that those who voted against this resolution, or refused to sign a promise to break with the *Junge Gemeinde*, would be expelled, and several hundred young church members were thus ousted from their schools.

The *Studentengemeinde*, the Student Christian Association related to the Evangelical Churches, was also under attack. In several universities student assemblies were asked to pronounce themselves against it, and several of its leaders were arrested. About fifty pastors and church workers were also arrested for unknown reasons.

As we received the proofs of this *News Sheet* we heard that a sudden complete change was taking place in the situation. Representatives of the Evangelical Church and of the government had met at a conference on June 10, 1953. They had agreed that the unity of Germany and peace were of primary importance, and the state had therefore promised to respect the constitutional rights of the church. It is too early to foresee the exact consequences of this reversal of policy. But whatever may happen in the future, readers of the *News Sheet* will value this record of the eternal witness of the church in suffering, and the opportunity to support by prayer those who are still bearing it, and to join the church in thanksgiving where doors are being opened.

Here is the official text of the agreement reached at the conference between the government and the church. (Points 5-9 are summarized.)

(1) No further measures of any kind will be taken against the "so-called *Junge Gemeinde*" or against any church institution. The Ministry for Youth, with W. Ulbricht representing President Grotewohl, is asked to clarify, together with representatives of the church, the *Junge Gemeinde*, and the Free Democratic Youth, all contested points concerning the *Junge Gemeinde*.

(2) All pupils who have been expelled from the high schools as a result of the political examinations of the schools and the public discussions on the activities of the *Junge Gemeinde*, must be permitted to return to school immediately. They must be given the possibility of taking any examinations they may have missed. The Ministry for Education must examine immediately the cases of teachers who have been expelled for the same reasons and reach some decision about them.

(3) The cases of all those who have been expelled from the universities because of their membership in the *Evangelische* or other *Studentengemeinden*, must be immediately examined by the Secretary of State for the Universities and must be settled by June 20, 1953.

(4) The Ministry for Education must immediately work out arrangements for the teaching of religion in the schools. The limitations on such teaching, in force since January 1, 1953, must be re-examined and suppressed.

(5) The homes and other property of the church which have been confiscated must be returned.

(6) The case of the vacation houses must be examined by the Secretary of State.

(7) The judgments passed by the law courts of the country must be examined and all injustices eliminated.

(8) The regulation concerning the announcement of meetings and activities, in force since March 29, 1952, must be re-examined and any rigidity eliminated.

(9) The financial support of the churches must be carried on according to regulations.

¹ *Das Zeugnis der Verhafteten* (Lettner-Verlag, Berlin).

THE WITNESS OF THE IMPRISONED

Dr. Martin Fischer's booklet is a call to intercession for the pastors and church workers in the German Democratic Republic who have been arrested. It contains reports written by Pastor Johannes Hamel about his work as a student pastor in Halle, pronouncements by East German churches concerning the arrests, and the letter on the same subject written by Professor Karl Barth to the authorities of the German Democratic Republic.

Preface by Dr. Martin Niemöller

The message which is entrusted to the church proclaims the salvation of God, and therefore calls all men to conversion — to turn from all self-made doctrines of salvation, that they may turn towards the One Word made Flesh in whom God offers and brings about His salvation.

In a world where men and nations, systems and ideologies are in continual conflict, this message is now welcomed as an ally, now combated as an adversary, by the contending parties. But it is neither an ally nor an adversary; it is never a party to the conflict, and therefore wherever it is truly heard, it is either believed and accepted or rejected and hated: it is neither "Western" nor "Eastern". It preaches conversion and salvation to both sides, indeed to all sides. And where it does not call forth obedience, it inevitably arouses hatred and hostility, in the West as well as in the East: "Ye shall be hated by all men for my name's sake."

So long as the message had to speak out clearly against nazism, it was misconstrued as a justification of all nazism's opponents; that is to say, the church was in those days counted as an ally by all these opponents, and the misconception has persisted to this day. It is only seen to be a misconception when the nature of the message as a judgment causes it to speak out likewise against these "friends" and their self-justification. When that happens, it becomes clear that there is and must always be a "church struggle". The form and method of the "struggle" are not determined by the church: the church has only to do one thing — witness, and use one method — suffering. And since it knows that the victory is already gained once and for all time, it carries on the struggle without bitterness or hatred, in penitence and prayer. The antagonists who believe that they must fight against the church in order to establish their own righteousness employ very different forms and methods, according to their own natures and characters, systems and programs: temperate forms to draw the church to their side, using correspondingly temperate methods, going as far as imperceptible, hidden corruption, and then again, violent forms in order to frighten the opponent, with violent methods which do not stop at fire and sword. So the eternal church struggle assumes different aspects: what does not and cannot change is the response — the church's witness which comforts in suffering, the witness to grace and truth — Jesus Christ.

The world today has its own manner and its own means of describing the struggle: it does not understand what is happening, and can only represent it as a partisan conflict, in order to exonerate itself by seeking to throw the onus on the other side. It is the responsibility of the church to see that the

witness is not shouted down by the noise the world makes, but is cried aloud, so that the suffering of the witnesses — where and when God wills it — may become an instrument of the Holy Spirit to convince, to call forth repentance and faith, to proclaim the victory of God and thereby the peace of His forgiveness and renewal.

What follows is intended to be a contribution to this witness, the contribution of the present generation which is being led today into tribulation, and to whom also the words could be applied: "Follow their faith" (Heb. 13 : 7).

* * *

Those who wish to make intercession need to have a knowledge of the facts. The intention here is not so much to give you information about political events, which you can get from the newspapers and in conversation, but about the situation and the task of the church. We want to tell you about prisoners who are servants of the Gospel. Among them we shall especially mention Pastor Johannes Hamel of Halle, because he can be taken as a symbol of a living church confessing its faith, and because he has again and again affirmed clearly the purpose and meaning of his work. Profound transformations are taking place in the economic life and judicial system of that part of Germany which was put under Soviet occupation through the Potsdam Agreement. But the church lives here, just as it does in the whole of Germany. It lives in the congregations, in the ringing proclamation of its witness to the Word. In this setting many have been put in prison. Until recently few pastors had been arrested, and when they were it was *for other reasons*. But in recent weeks many men and women have been arrested *because* they were in the service of the church. This is why we ask: what is the witness of the imprisoned?

The Junge Gemeinde

Let us look at the youth of the church. It has become an act of courage for a young person to wear the badge of the *Junge Gemeinde* (church youth group) as a sign of dedication to the service of the Gospel. It frequently happens that an unusually difficult witness is demanded of young people who are not yet fully confirmed in the faith and before they are adequately prepared. Those who have said yes to Christ have no idea what the consequences may be. By so doing they have put themselves in a danger zone; God expects that they will hold to their yes and makes them to witness in a way which is rarely required of young people.

What is this *Junge Gemeinde*? The older ones among us remember with what anxiety we watched the attack of the Third Reich on the youth work of the church. At that time it seemed to us that everything possible was being done to sever youth from the Gospel and the church. But it is precisely those who were young at that time who have made up the spirited crowds gathered at the *Kirchentags* in Berlin, Stuttgart and elsewhere, to listen, to study, to sing and to pray. We are reminded of the Old Testament stories of the journey of the people of Israel through the desert. There a people trembled for its youth and struggled with God (Numbers 4: 14). Those who trembled and struggled perished in the desert, but the youth who had

caused them such great anxiety came into the Promised Land. It is the same today. The youth which the Third Reich meant to sever from the church was so marked by the witness of the church, and not least by the witness of the imprisoned, that is, by the witness of a confessing church, that it has taken for its own the Gospel and its message.

When the Third Reich collapsed in 1945, for many it meant the collapse of their world, but they were ready to listen anew. Those who did not fall victim to new ideologies, were able to change and correct their former position. The youth work of the church again took shape, and those who had not succumbed to but had resisted the Third Reich, became once more messengers of the Gospel to the young people. So youth was gathered again under God's Word in both East and West, in such a way that it was a kind of confessing church even before a church struggle began. In many places it has really committed itself to take the Gospel seriously. In the *Junge Gemeinde* instruction is preceded by worship; pastoral care, founded on the Bible, is given and received, and the community of prayer is experienced before the altar. The *Junge Gemeinde* lives in the German Democratic Republic although, as in the Third Reich, such activities as excursions have been forbidden, and as a result it has become even more of a community around the Word of God in which the call to obedience to the faith is heard and answered.

In 1953 Landesbischof D. Hahn stated before the synod of Saxony: "The *Junge Gemeinde* is not an organization; it is the work of the church among the young, confirmed members of the congregation. It is in reality a sign of the well-developed life of a congregation. In principle, then, every young member of the church belongs to the *Junge Gemeinde*. When it maintains its relationships with its brothers and sisters in Western Germany, it does not go beyond the legitimate responsibility of the church to preach the Gospel. It not only has a right to do so, but a duty. It refuses to allow itself to be used as an instrument of political interests, and has therefore an absolutely clear conscience with regard to the slanderous charges that it is contaminated by the spirit of imperialism. Those who attack the *Junge Gemeinde* attack the church."

The Evangelische Studentengemeinde

The same is true of the *Evangelische Studentengemeinde*. In the largest universities, it is no exception but the rule that two, three or four hundred students gather for Bible study. Those who come to know these student congregations marvel at the sense of community which exists in them. The homes of most of their members are not in the university towns — they come from far away to study. They are soon drawn together by their common need and understanding of their task. They come eagerly to hear the proclamation of the Word and speak frankly to one another in their pastoral care. For them it is a matter of faith or unbelief, of truth or lies, of acceptance and obedience.

From a letter written by Pastor Hamel in 1948:

"My office hours every day from two to four are always full. Very often students are still waiting at six o'clock. Since I am not in a position to give material help, these students come only with problems of a spiritual nature, seeking advice and the comfort of the Gospel, or with serious political problems.

During this semester I have heard more confessions than in my whole life together before."

From a letter written by a student in Halle in 1950 :

"Soon after the beginning of the semester the large hall which we were using was unable to accommodate the crowds. It was a joy, in spite of the difficulties of lack of space, to see so many students coming not in search of sensation but to listen to God's Word. It seems that the effects of the political difficulties of our time on us and our congregation could be described in the words of Joseph : 'You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good' (Gen. 50 : 20). Last semester articles full of hate against Pastor Hamel appeared in the newspapers, and this semester meetings of the communist party have been much occupied with us, so that we might expect that sheer fear would keep students from coming to our meetings. However, it has happened more than once that even party officials have 'fallen victims to the reactionary propaganda of the infamous student pastor and his clique', and we have thus gained valuable co-workers. Again, outsiders have often received help from the student pastor in their struggles of conscience created by their political involvement, and so have found a heart completely open to them, and felt that here their needs were taken seriously and not brushed aside with catchwords. Many have been simply compelled to listen to a voice of such courage and freedom, as it spoke in the Bible studies, and to those of the bishop speaking from the pulpit, and of the church councils, all pronouncing with absolute clarity on the questions of the present day, and in listening they had to recognize that these were truly voices of peace.

"But all this is only a feeble effort to explain that the Gospel is a dynamic force and that we have experienced it in our *Studentengemeinde*. Praise be to the eternal and merciful God for this ! The greatness of the power of God has never been more clearly revealed to us, and could hardly be better expressed, than in the following somewhat desperate statement made in a meeting of the communist youth : 'We cannot get a hold on them ; they always hide behind their God', or in a remark made in a discussion as to whether convinced materialists should be sent into the *Studentengemeinde* in order to try to win over its members and thus create division among them : 'It is dangerous ; they come back as Christians.'"

It was while doing this work that Pastor Hamel, Vikar Althausen, Travelling Secretary of the *Studentengemeinde*, and Gisela Schwan, a student of mathematics, were arrested.¹ A number of the leading members of the student congregations have been expelled from the universities, and some have escaped threatened arrest by fleeing.

The Witness of Pastor Hamel

The best known among those who have been imprisoned is perhaps Pastor Hamel, the student pastor in Halle, who was arrested on February 12, 1953. Halle, a city in central Germany where church influence has become practically nil, is a hard place to tackle. Yet it was there that Pastor Hamel, through his preaching, was influencing hundreds of students and many professors, and also students, professors and pastors far beyond Halle itself.

¹ Since this was written Student Pastor Brandt in Potsdam has also been arrested.

Hamel, like his former professor, Schniewinds, was primarily concerned to bear witness to the Gospel of God's will to save through Jesus Christ, to the free grace of God. He was not proclaiming some human law and wisdom, but the Gospel and the real law of God which demands obedience, and above all the obedience of faith. Redemption through the Cross of Jesus Christ has been preached among us in a most impressive and convincing way. What was once written of Schniewinds could well be said of Hamel: "With what passion he struggled against the Protestant man who easily excuses his own sin and makes peace with it under the guise of forgiveness."

The pastoral care given by such people is characterized by courage and a sense of responsibility. We emphasize this because "the cure of souls" is often conceived of as a "kid gloves" treatment of man. Faith cannot mean "wash me but don't get me wet". Boldness is essential. If in pastoral counseling we believe that the future is in the hands of God, this must be made relevant to the present situation and our response to it. Such cure of souls demands truth and allows no game of hide-and-seek. There are men who love Hamel because of his liberating courage, and there are others who hate him because he has caught them, with their sin, in their noisy, stubborn efforts at deception. Those who were in such danger encountered a man who — merciful and yet determined — sought to sever them from their guilt. Specific sins were called by their names. He did battle for men. In Halle steel struck into Christian verbiage and political lies. Much of the political hostility which Hamel encountered resulted from his responsible pastoral care. There is about him none of the heavy atmosphere of the inquisition, but rather a free and happy spirit, so much so that those without this spirit and who are not themselves free, cannot endure him.

Hamel knew that he was in danger. He used to like speaking to the unfortunate men who had to keep him under surveillance. But he could not let up on his work. He never knew an instant's doubt as to whether he ought to stay in Halle or not. There was no lack of warnings and invitations to leave. There were frequent outbursts against him in the press and in public demonstrations. But he carried on with the witness which it was his duty to bear, and preached the Gospel in peace and confidence. This made him a refuge for those who sought courage and aid. He helped many to gain greater strength. But the decisive factor was his witness itself, and all the things, great and small, which he did to help other people, were intended only as the implementation of the witness he knew had been laid upon him.

Obedience in the faith as it used to be practised in the Confessing Church accompanied Hamel into the new circumstances. He had a clear grasp of the situation, and cannot be said to be short-sighted or to have illusions. He and the others who have been arrested are one in refusing to subscribe to the recent attempts in both West and East to establish a system of "throne and altar", at the same time rejecting that form of piety which disdains the world and seeks God in the airless interior of a self-sufficient church. They gladly acknowledge secular achievement, but they feel bound also to unmask lying machinations without remorse. They were led to do this, as they dealt with particular texts and circumstances, in sermons and Bible classes. In Hamel's student congregation especially, pious silence was abandoned, the truth came forth and made men free.

Those thus rejoicing in their freedom might easily have fallen into all sorts of "politicalizing" errors. But he himself put a stop to such errors wherever he came across them. He abode by the doctrine of the justification of the godless through the love of God, and destroyed self-elected piety. Nor did he allow the Gospel's rightful place to be usurped by any political activity, undertaken in a kind of crusading spirit. Hamel and his friend Althausen were certainly among those who warned immature youth against political underground work. He condemned anything that could not be ventured upon openly as not in keeping with the task of the church. He said in public many things that made fearful people tremble. But he was not trying to be contentious, only constructive. It was in this spirit that, at the request of the Conference of Student Pastors, he approached the Minister for College Education, Professor Harig, drawing his attention to the injurious consequences of the overburdening of students with work under the new ten-month academic year. It was in this spirit that the members of his congregation visited student leaders desirous of packing their Student Council at its forthcoming elections, to talk them into a better frame of mind. And it was in this spirit too that Hamel protested to RIAS, the West Berlin radio station, pointing out the unfortunate effects of some of its propaganda. Exhorting, pleading, striving on behalf of law and order — all this was done whatever the cost, even if the cost were liberty itself.

As Pastor Hamel said, "Our liberty consists in loving our brethren now, and in meeting them in truth and great understanding, giving them freely of our time and not driving them into a corner. This we must do even if our openness delivers us into their hands and we have no further control over possible developments." No-one who regards pastors as tolerable from the point of view of the state only so long as they are inactive and easy-going, can tolerate Hamel. On the other hand, anyone who wishes men ready to give and serve cannot but love him. Anyone doing wrong can only dread him, and hate him with an undying hatred. His friends could not help realizing that he was surrounded by people who hated him. For that reason fearful men shrank from him. They would not have done so with a clear conscience had they only understood the kind of witness he was bearing. But those who stood fast by him were frequently set free to live, to live in the truth.

Community Life of the Studentengemeinde

People from different parts of the country came together freely in Halle, and a well-developed community grew up. Strangers to the *Studentengemeinde* were surprised. Why should these students find it interesting and necessary to gather for twenty or thirty minutes before the Bible study to discuss matters of their community life? For how long have Christians been interested in "organization"? Those who could think only in political terms, necessarily suspected organization. In reality the students were making plans for and challenging the congregation to community service.

Hamel tells about the work of the student leaders in a letter written in 1947 :

"We avoid the impoverishment and shrinking of the congregation that would be caused by a 'pastor-monarchy'. In choosing our student leaders, we look for and find those, suited for this service, who have been given to us.

There is thus no need for a secret ballot. Pastoral care is given through these older, mature, and dedicated members of the congregation. I am often told about cases of special need. Frequently students help others by leading them to make confession. A small prayer group supports the pastor in this work."

From another letter of Pastor Hamel :

"Much to my joy more and more people are coming to understand that good works must be the natural result of faith, and that not only the pastor but the whole congregation is called to acts of love. Students visit the sick and discover those among their fellows who are in need, most of whom have had no previous contact with the church. They minister to those who are in spiritual trouble and help those who are having difficulties with their studies. Above all, following the Wednesday Bible study, they bring bread and other food to share with those who are in greatest need. In the same way, following the currency reform, they brought money from their own small means to help poorer students."

In the congregations, as should be the case among members of the Body of Christ, they gave news of other student groups. They were visited by church authorities ; they planned excursions and study group meetings ; they administered relief, and gave subjects for prayers of intercession, and in so doing manifested a fully-developed community life. And while church authorities argue endlessly about whether or not these student congregations can be considered as congregations in the full sense of the word, given the fact that they do not have members of all kinds and all ages, in fact there we find the marks of the life of a real congregation — the kind of life one would like to see in the local congregations which meet the requirements of church regulations. By living such a life a congregation naturally finds itself in dangerous waters : when you deal with human problems and needs, you do not live in an ivory tower, but in the world among real men.

From a letter written by a student in Halle in 1950 :

"Through the help of our co-workers in the group, we are able to discover fellow students who, too proud to make their need known, have endangered their health by making frequent blood donations, by regular night work, by caring for sick people during the night, or by giving up hot meals because of lack of money. Thanks to the work of the medical care group, the sick enjoy an occasional delicacy from a package sent by a brother congregation, or receive medicine and treatment."

Prayer and action go hand in hand. Those who are in need receive help ; those who have fallen in the struggle are rescued ; the despised are not forgotten. In thus obeying the biblical commandment, we discover through living out the Gospel that Christ indeed draws to Himself seemingly unlovable people. Precisely because of this it is necessary to bear witness openly to the Gospel before all men, and thus to test it. This has been done in Halle. That is why the attack on the church, made through these arrests and which must be justified, goes so very deep.

"We cannot withdraw"

When in the church such a pastor has borne this kind of witness before all the world, so that it could be examined and publicly debated, his arrest is of extraordinarily wide significance. A blow like this never touches only

its instigator and its victim, but always the wider public. Confidence in the prisoner increases among those who knew the witness he bore; above all, their confidence is destroyed in those who carry out arrests without stating clearly and publicly their reasons. So far, in most cases neither the victim's church nor his family has been notified of any reason for his arrest. Hamel did his work with a good conscience. His congregation followed him with a good conscience. And a good conscience is something no power in the world can break. People can be broken so they are no longer recognizable and have lost their faces and their names, but conscience cannot be overcome except with truth. When Pastor Hamel is alleged to have engaged in underground work, those who know him simply laugh. When the list of his students' addresses is twisted into a list of underground workers, away goes the last remnant of confidence in those who produce or believe such statements. A man who bears witness to the Gospel compels the truth. If his enemies fight him with other means, then over him stands God Himself. If he falls, he falls into the hands of God.

We might well ask whether it is advisable in a cold war to single out one prisoner, as we are doing with Pastor Hamel, but *the crucial thing here is not only the freeing of the prisoners but even more their witness*. If the congregation does not see to it that their imprisonment makes their witness all the more clear and effective, it has failed. The devil, who does not want faith to live in either East or West, always achieves something when he succeeds in obscuring and confusing the genuine witness of Christians. Such witness is not always successful and often requires sacrifice — this the prisoners know. We are all agreed that imprisonment can also be a form of Christian service. If among the unfortunate people in a country there were no Christians or no pastors, we would despair of Christianity there. We owe it to those in power to show them that the church and its pastors are not there merely to maintain their own position.

The life of the church has become a dangerous one, especially for those whose work is of broad scope and covers a wide area. Here the relationships established among the congregations is suspected of being the kind of organization which the state forbids. The witness of Vikar Althausen, who was arrested February 13, 1953, was a simple ministry to the student congregations, direction of Bible study (which was the subject of the last article he wrote), and leadership in congregational singing and prayer. The only thing which could make him suspect was his travelling, which has greatly benefitted many student congregations. Actually at the time of his arrest he had already given up this job to continue his training as a pastor.

Should we abandon these jobs which cover a wide area because the people who are doing them are in danger? We cannot do so. We cannot insult the authorities by suspecting that they are intentionally being unjust, and we will continue to do what is necessary. We shall not, through anxiety and fear, reduce the normal activities of the student congregations, but shall continue our work.

It is rather absurd that such political accusations are levelled against these young people that state authorities who are not well informed are bound to assume that they are political troublemakers. It is not easy for the youth of the church and the student congregations to discover, almost overnight, that they are being described as bands of criminals, agents of Adenauer,

illegal organizations in the service of the Bonn government, plague carriers, and so forth, to cite just a few of the more polite epithets. But such accusations cannot cause us to withdraw into our holes, which even in itself is dangerous. On the contrary, we owe it to the state and to the church to continue the work which we have been doing with a good conscience, in order that the state may have an opportunity to learn more about our work, and therefore to recognize its necessity.

Letter of Professor Karl Barth

It was in this connection that Professor Karl Barth wrote on March 2, 1953, the following letter to the Minister for Security of the German Democratic Republic :

"Permit me to approach you in relation to a matter which has been of great concern to me in recent days. You may have heard of me; if not, you can easily get information about me, the work I have done, and my convictions. I can state that I am one of those who, in Western Europe, especially in the circles of the Evangelical Church, but also in a wider public sphere, have consistently since 1945 taken a stand for a sympathetic attitude towards the East. I have therefore been violently attacked as a secret communist. In Western Germany I am bound to Pastor Martin Niemöller and Dr. Heinemann by ties of friendship, as well as by common activities. In the summer of 1946 I was received in Berlin by State President Pieck (in the presence of Messrs. Grotewohl and Ulbricht) and by Tulpánovw, who was then Soviet Military Commander.

"I have just received the news of the arrest of Studentenpfarrer Johannes Hamel and Vikar Althausen in Halle, of Jugendpfarrer Reinhold George in East Berlin, of Diakon Dost and Gemeindehelfer Schilling in Leipzig, of Pfarrer Dr. Winterhager in Mark, and of the sentencing of Prediger Schumann in Zwickau. The number of these cases leads to the conclusion that we have here a well-calculated plan of action of the government of the German Democratic Republic.

"Leaving aside what binds me as a Christian to the people involved and to the Evangelical Church in the German Democratic Republic, may I draw your attention to the following points :

"The fact that the church in the German Democratic Republic has until now been free to live its own life within the socialist state, that it has been able to follow the way commanded by its Lord, and to speak the Word entrusted to it, these facts were something to which one could point *positively* with a good conscience, in the midst of the storm of indignation in the Western world over the unaccustomed methods and attitudes of the socialist governments of the Eastern states. The activity of a man like Johannes Hamel was a shining example not only of the freedom with which the church was carrying out its task, but also of the vision of those who granted such liberty to it. In this connection I have more than once quoted the words which I heard in 1946 from the lips of State President Pieck : 'What Germany needs in the new era is to hear again the preaching of the Ten Commandments !' And now there is every good reason to consider Johannes Hamel and the others who have been affected by the recent action as authentic witnesses to precisely the Ten Commandments. I can understand that from the political point of view of the state it is not always desirable for the church, following its own

law, to proclaim openly its witness, as the prisoners have done. Those who do this must expect trouble, also in the Western countries, and Switzerland is no exception. But up until now the government of the German Democratic Republic seemed to be willing to accept this as a consequence of the existence of a free church, and in any case not to use force in the event of a conflict.

"The measures taken against Johannes Hamel and his companions imply for this picture a serious threat which is heavy with consequences. If the government of the German Democratic Republic reacts as it just has to the activity of such representatives of the church, it is difficult or even impossible any longer to hold to the assumption that it wills the existence of a free church. It seems to verify some of the worst things which the most vocal Western opponents of the forms of government in the Eastern states have always said : that under the rule of the German Democratic Republic (as once under the Hitler state), only a church which conforms to the official cultural doctrine, that is, which is not free and which is necessarily therefore un-Christian, has a legitimate status ; that a church which would want to remain a Christian church would have to withdraw into some kind of catacombs.

"This is the new picture of Eastern politics with regard to the church which, as a result of the measures now taken, will and must inevitably be formed. I cannot imagine, sir, that the formation of this picture — this adding of one more argument to the anti-Eastern ammunition — serves the peace for which all thoughtful men in both East and West must stand. Neither can I imagine that it is in the interests of the German Democratic Republic, if these are well understood.

"The purpose of my letter is to put briefly the *urgent question* of whether you and the whole government of the German Democratic Republic are conscious of the danger you are running, and just as briefly the *urgent request* that you put an end to the measures that have been taken and that they be retracted.

"Please do not be offended, sir, that I, a foreigner, have written to you about this matter. I had to do it because it really does not concern only Germany, but from the point of view of the church and of politics it concerns all those who know that they have a common responsibility for past and future developments."

Respectfully yours, KARL BARTH.

The Witness of Community Service

The witness of the imprisoned is *a witness to the visible congregation, to the visible church*. To become one in prayer means coming together to listen to God's Word, to practise obedience, and to overcome together all temptation and tribulation. No longer do we just gather for an edifying Sunday service ; there are no more meetings which do not lead to prayer and create a will to act. There is no community without community action. What does the community do about those who fall into error ? Those who are in need ? Those who are in disfavour politically ? Their families ? What does it do to warn the authorities when they are about to make mistakes ? How does it interpret concretely Ezekiel 3 ? In what way does it serve and for what does it pray ?

The imprisoned have been arrested because they did not limit their ministry to a purely "spiritual" service but exercised it in a visible community. They

were not so much concerned with pious speeches as that the lives of real people in a real community should bear fruit. Therefore they created the false suspicion that their aim was to split the youth of the country. But when the secular powers, parties and organizations refuse to tolerate the gathering together of Christians and suspects them of divisive activity, they have become totalitarian, and inevitably come into conflict with the church. Those who would evade this conflict, would betray the state by permitting it to become totalitarian, and the church by leading it into deception.

The Witness of Suffering

It is the Christian task to see that right does not give place to power and that justice is done. Is this not meaningless idealism? In the history of marxism there have always been periods when many people suffered. Is there therefore no further meaning in the church's suffering? This is not difficult to answer. We are not free to choose — God calls us to witness. If our witness brings with it imprisonment, we can only commit our souls to Him. Many of the imprisoned could have avoided arrest. They had been warned. If all the pastors who have been warned had already abandoned their congregations, there would hardly be one left in the country as a faithful witness. As a rule they have remained. How foolish of them, many practical people in both East and West would say. Those in both East and West who claim that there is no possibility of remaining in the other section, cannot understand any pastor or any man who feels that he must serve the men there, even if it means suffering. More than one suicide has taken place which could have been avoided if a pastor or a Christian had been there to help. Who knows whether God will not one day put these deaths to our charge? "Those who have faith do not run away."

This remaining is also a witness: pastors and Christians remain to reconcile, to preach redemption and peace. To say no to specific acts of injustice is part of this work for reconciliation and peace. Their task is not to lead others to renounce anger against injustice, but to cast out their hatred against those who commit it. There are so many cries of "kill, kill" in the world, and the imprisoned would surely not want their suffering to augment them. To use their imprisonment as a call for blood is to betray their witness. They are in prison because they want to witness to peace and reconciliation to those who have imprisoned them. A congregation should never seek communion with God for itself alone. It wills much more that all men should not fall under the anger of God but be converted and thus be saved from it. Christians themselves must be constantly reconverted if they are not to fall victims to their many burdens, their danger, exhaustion, resignation and despair.

Witness to the Word

Efforts are being made today to force the church to confine itself purely to worship. The Russian Church, for instance, has always, in its inmost spiritual essence, been a worshipping church, and not a church believing, in the Protestant sense, upon the living Word. Such actions as the prohibition of evangelistic campaigns or the suppression of theological faculties, which do not seem to have disturbed it greatly, would cut the Evangelical Church in Germany to the quick. The Evangelical Church is a church of the Word. Its witnesses must bring home the commandments, the Gospel, the Word of God to all

the world, and they cannot withdraw into some mere "Wordless" life of worship. A service of worship can be full of words, and still remain almost Wordless. But God desires that the living Word be proclaimed, relevant to the time for which it is uttered, faithful to His will for here and now, and counter to the will of the Powers of Darkness. To seek and to speak that Word is the whole life of the Evangelical Church. It lives by the Word and it lives in the Word. Thence it has its faith, and thence its prayer.

At the same time, we have learned to regard as indispensable the extending of the work into wider fields beyond sheer serving of the Word of God. Only under duress can the church weaken in its public ministry. Only under duress can it cease to proclaim the Word of God in the universities, the faculties and the student congregations. Only under duress can it allow itself to be reduced to small parishes or regional boards. Having unity in the faith, it is called upon to give expression to that unity, and only under duress can it permit a cleavage in it. Where the extensions of the church's service are being restricted or prohibited, it means that the state has resolved to give battle.

Struggle for the Truth

The irresponsibility of political propaganda bears heavily on the church. There is no church activity which has not been exploited by the political propaganda of West (or East). Many people are in danger because of the thirst of the Western powers for propaganda material. All the protests of the church against such exploitation have had little effect. The increasing fear between the big powers is so great that the church can no longer serve man in either West or East without being suspect. But the church must live on through good and bad repute. Woe to the church if it falls into error because it yields! It is easy to despise it and its work — much of the good which it does cannot be publicized because it would immediately be used for political propaganda in either East or West, and thus lose its significance. The church is under the Word of God which says: "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matt. 6:3). It does what it must, what falls to it to do. It must almost itself forget what it does, and in no case must it boast of its good works to the world to its own glory. As a result it is written off as something insignificant, and it is easy for those in power and their minions to make of it their whipping-boy.

To serve the church has once again become dangerous. The eyes of the public are upon the pastors and their colleagues. A careless word can result in five years' hard labour, or even in twelve. The provocative molestation of the church's day-to-day work must not sting its victims to a single ill-considered word, though the public is being worked on by a barrage of defamatory allegations concerning church leaders and activities. One thing that is constantly occurring is for irresponsible accusations to be levelled against student congregations or the youth groups of the churches, and for various bodies to be thereupon obliged, without further information on the subject, to vote for or against the suppression of the student congregations. To vote for those attacked in this way is of course perilous in the extreme. And so everything is conditioned by terrorism and interdiction. Already those regarded as being in danger are joyfully welcomed every time they are met, for we do not know whether we shall meet them again, because of the frontiers and walls which could close between us.

Is it possible to hold out at all under such a threat — quite regardless of whether it is imaginary or not? Would it not be better to clear out? Is there not some inner retreat where we would be in nobody's way, where the devil himself would not bother about our murmuring over our liturgies in secret? But would it not be fear which would dictate such a withdrawal? That course must not be taken, at any rate not on the church's own responsibility, but only under the constraint of persecution. If we are not to revile authority as one that has already ordered persecution and will continue to do so, we must in all simplicity do what God commands us to do, what we believe necessary, in the hope that it cannot with justice be said that the church has done anything but what it is obliged by the Word of God to do and to allow. In a time of twilight and of misunderstanding, the church must live all the more unitedly and unequivocally, as the Word of God demands and the prayers of men desire. It must simply endure, through all misrepresentations, no matter how gigantic. No sacrifice is too great if it is aimed at recalling to the state and the church the true nature and mystery of the church. It may be that this will open up access to a genuine relationship between church and state, such as those who bear witness are striving for. It may be that it will quite literally save the church's life, where any premature weakening would give grounds for suspicion and endanger that life. Guided by the witness of those under arrest, the church must think over its position quietly, so that it may not react haphazardly, but may realize and respond to the situation confronting it in a real sense of responsibility and community. What is acting like a painstakingly organized system of terrorization should stab the church awake, refashion it in the way it should be. Only thus refashioned can it render even to the state the service due it.

A Time of Grace

Unless appearances are very misleading indeed, the church in this country is entering upon a new period of grace. Unless appearances are very misleading indeed, the people now in prison are harbingers of spring. Does anyone wish to be left out? Does anyone wish to count as happy those men who are looking to their own safety? We shall know for certain from the attitude taken by the state towards those it has arrested whether it desires a church struggle or not. Much suffering which is endured is meaningless if it is unaccompanied by witness. But by this witness we are set in a new world, in which men can live and die.

Therefore, dear brethren, take heart. God has a store of hidden possibilities for the church. We are being tested to the limit. Who would deny that God and men have the right to make this test? Some of us for whom faith and salvation are of prime importance have been very lonely in recent years, unbelievably lonely. These are finding again brothers and sisters. They are coming together again and experiencing the joy of common life in the faith. Perhaps this period which seems so dark and difficult is really a time of grace. Only those will come through this test who understand and live it in Jesus Christ. Who will stand the test? Only Jesus Christ and those whom He recreates. What will stand the test? Only the Gospel of the living God. Only in this test will we find ourselves united with the whole church and with the cloud of witnesses who before us have carried the Cross.

INTERCESSIONS

COMMENDED TO THE CONGREGATIONS BY THE FRATERNAL COUNCIL
OF THE CONFESSING CHURCH IN GERMANY, MARCH, 1953

Lord, dear Lord !

O thou mighty, holy and merciful Lord !

Who hast been tempted in all things like as we are and yet without sin,
Who hast suffered all our fears and forsakenness unto the depths of hell,
Who hast won the victory for us for time and eternity,
We come to thee because we have no other refuge but thee alone,
We thank thee that we may come to thee and lay our sin and misery before thee
who art our only counsellor and help,

Lord, we call upon thee :

Lord, have mercy upon us !

O thou who dost forgive sin, overcome our pride and indifference, our lack of faith,
and our doubt, so that we fear not, neither fall into despair.

O Lord of glory, overcome our fear of suffering, which makes us flee from thy cross.
Awaken through thy word the hope, which triumphs over all.

Awaken the compassion, which takes upon itself another's burden.

Lord, we call upon thee :

Lord, have mercy upon us !

Behold the pressure under which thy church lives in East and West, how they try
to divide us, we who are still brothers in thee.

Take away all evil counsel and bad intention, which close the door to thy holy and
saving Word.

Be the refuge of all young Christians, who confess thee with us as our only Lord
over all the principalities and powers of this world.

Lord, we call upon thee :

Lord, have mercy upon us !

Behold what is happening to those whom thou hast called the least of these thy
brethren,

Those who have been deprived of their rights, their possessions, and their liberty.
We pray for those who have lost their country, that through thy grace they may
find their home in thee.

We pray for those who remain, that they may find their refuge in thee, that they may
stand fast in their duty, in confidence in thee.

We pray for our brethren, who suffer for thy name's sake,

That we, with them, may be certain that nothing or no-one can take us out of thy
hands,

That when men no longer know us, thou wilt know us still.

Lord, we call upon thee :

Lord, have mercy upon us !

We pray for the authorities, who do their duty before thine eyes, even when they
do not know thee nor want to know thee,

Thou who art sovereign over all the world, and who dost act according to thy wise,
all-powerful counsel, even though it may be hidden from us,

Grant that all those in positions of power may deal humanely with their fellow men.

Bring the peace for which the nations yearn after so much shedding of blood.

Grant that the spirit of reconciliation may be victorious among us, and bless every
work which serves justice and peace in truth.

Lord, we call upon thee :

Lord, have mercy upon us !

O Lord, who hast ordained an end to this world that thy eternal kingdom may come,
grant that we may set our hopes on thee, beyond life and death, on thee who wilt
return in glory and manifest thy sovereignty, to the joy of those who wait upon
thee.

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen !